THE TRAGIC HERO WITH TWO FACES: CAMPBELL IN VONNEGUT'S MOTHER NIGHT

Edith-Hilde Kaiter
Lecturer, PhD., "Mircea cel Bătrân" Naval Academy of Constanţa

Abstract:Kurt Vonnegut's Mother Night, written in 1962, shares with its readers the war experience as seen by the author. Therefore, the action of the novel is narrated by Howard W. Campbell Jr., as the main character of a very complex war story.
The hereby paper aims at the internal struggle within the protagonist which is gradually dramatized, making the reader ask himself if Campbell pretends only to be a Nazi or he is one and at Vonnegut's special way of addressing other aspects of World War II, such as the power of words, rather than the power of bombs, to support the Nazi war effort in a war narrative where light and darkness are hard to distinguish.

Keywords: war, identity, message, fiction, hero.

Kurt Vonnegut had started his more obvious engagement with World War II with *Mother Night*, published in 1961, eight years before his much more successful representation of that particular war and of his own personal experience was shaped in *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969). In the introductory chapter of the 1969 novel, the author explains why it took him so long to finish his fictional confrontation with his life experience in a very critical moment in world history, as well as in his personal story. The absurdity of his own war experience, as well as the meaninglessness of what he witnessed, were, more than for Ernest Hemingway or for Norman Mailer, more than an invitation to write a non-narrative featuring anti-heroes about something most people called a war, something he called, in the novel's subtitle, "a children's crusade," while he refers to himself not as a writer, an author, but "as a pillar of salt". That story had to wait for a quarter of a century, or, better said, it had to go through a number of transformations and a lot of artistic experimentation, one of the major stages being his *Mother Night*.

Sanford Pinsker discusses Vonnegut's "comic nihilism" linked to his Tralfamadorian stories (which do not appear in the author's *Mother Night,* but will appear in many other books, particularly in his other World War II novel, *Slaughterhouse-Five*), and then goes on to note the difference that the 1961 novel makes, a key text between Modernist and Postmodernist fictional representations of history. Pinsker draws that line between modernism and postmodernism in relation to World War II, which was considered by other critics, and which had been a starting point in this dissertation:

> There is a cunning in history, particularly where the fiction writer is concerned. The dividing line between that consensus about history known as Modernism and the affair we call Post-Modernism is World War II. […] as Yeats and other Modernists understood, the center had been falling apart for some time. But the "new fiction" felt itself equal to the task of seeing modern life steadily and whole. The air was thick with competing manifestoes – and even a few giants with the talent required to make good on heady promises. (Pinsker 1980: 88)

World War II caused that great divide that Andreas Huyssen mentions in his book on modernism, mass culture and postmodernism, (Huyssen 158) as occurring about the time the

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second world conflagration divided the 20th century and world history between a significant *before* and a significant *after*. Pinsker contributes to the discussion describing that war as a particular development affecting representations of history, requiring a moral reappraisal after the horror of Auschwitz:

> World War II and its aftermath was another matter. Certain initiations – that modern warfare is technological and anti-heroic or that despair and disillusionment are fairly predictable by-products – were precluded in advance. Pound and Hemingway (to say nothing of Remarque) had proved already that the language of a recruitment poster lies. […] the decade after 1917 loosed hedonism onto an already weakening Victorian stage, while the world after Auschwitz cried out for moral reappraisal and a crash course in situation ethics. Perhaps that is why significant fiction about World War II has been a continuing problem for the contemporary novelist, rather than a subject to be exhausted. (Pinsker 1980: 88-89)

Kurt Vonnegut had not witnessed Auschwitz, but he had survived the firebombing of Dresden in February 1945: ironically, as an American prisoner of war in Germany. He did not just return to the U.S. after the war to write his own "farewell to arms." Among the books that can be counted as part of his novelistic apprenticeship, *Mother Night* holds a special place. A slim book, Vonnegut's 1961 volume is an unexpectedly complex text, featuring an unexpected kind of hero, at least considering the framework within which informed readers today would feel tempted to interpret him and his war story. Thomas Marvin, in his 2002 critical work, calls it his "most challenging and his most frequently misunderstood novel." (Marvin 59)

Misunderstanding the message of the book might appear surprising to the reader who starts, as anyone should, with the Introduction, in which the author clarifies his main statements. On the very first page, one gets the following messages, given here in the order in which they appear: 1. We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be 2. When you're dead you're dead.3. Make love when you can. It's good for you.

This might be seen as an ironical way of responding to readers that expect clear messages from an artistic work, but the statements will make sense in the novel, and obviously not only there. What Marvin does not mention is that the challenge and the misunderstanding might have to do with the very peculiar relationship between Vonnegut's own experience and background and that of his protagonist, more complex and less straightforward than that between himself and his far more successful (artistically speaking) anti-hero, Billy Pilgrim in *Slaughterhouse-Five.*

The absurdist outlook, as well as the entertaining mode that give a distinct flavour to Vonnegut's fiction are largely due to the large number of twists and oddities of history and personal history, ironies that affected the author in his formative years and even later. These grim ironies were not details observed by a cynical, detached observer of strangers' fates, but aspects of his own life, as well as of close relatives, in a more general way, aspects related to the destinies of two important countries in a German American's life, namely the United States and Germany.

During World War II Vonnegut was an American soldier having a German name but fighting against the Germans. He lost his mother on … Mother's Day, 1944. He became an American soldier with a German name, but unable to speak a word of German when he was taken prisoner by the Germans, around Christmas 1944. He was made to work in Dresden, a beautiful place, "the Florence of the Elbe." His temporary prison, an underground, airtight slaughterhouse, saved his life at the time of the firebombing of Dresden, which occurred on

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… St. Valentine's night, 1945. Allied bombers destroyed the city in a holocaust that killed more people than the bomb dropped over Hiroshima (at least that is what many people thought at the time), by all accounts one of the largest massacres in European history (second only to the bombing of Hamburg in August 1943). Kurt – the son and grandson of architects of German origin – survived the destruction of Dresden, one of Germany's architectural wonders, and of a large part of its population. What he witnessed on an apocalyptic scale was a development that is visible in 20th century warfare away from death coming from direct confrontation between two enemy camps towards death being indiscriminately inflicted on everybody, children, women, elderly people included. Based on the terrible figures provided by Marina MacKay in her Companion to World War II literature, "in World War I, approximately 95 percent of all casualties in war were combatants; in World War II 50 percent were civilians" (MacKay 60).

Mother Night created the coordinates within which the author could go closest to what a postmodernist novelist might come up with in the form of fictional protagonists worthy of their name, not puppets, not figures of fun or very artificial creations announcing the death of the hero, of the author, of war fiction itself. One might even wonder if Howard W. Campbell, in this postmodern, anti-heroic time and age, after the collapse of the grand narratives, cannot be interpreted as one of the last tragic heroes in what has become a very unheroic genre (war fiction as anti-war art).

The body of the book consists of "The Confessions of Howard W. Campbell, Jr.," a fictitious American born Nazi propagandist who, like the real Ezra Pound in Fascist Italy during World War II, is seen as one important supporter of Germany's anti-Semitic and anti-American war ideology. After the introduction and the editor's note, written, in a style that will also be used with great effect in the other war narrative, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, in Vonnegut's voice, the rest of the book is narrated in the voice of the protagonist, whom everybody (or almost everybody, as it will turn out) sees as an important Nazi criminal.

In addition to the case of Ezra Pound's collaborationism with the Italian Fascist regime, it is even more relevant to the novel to take into account the trial of Adolph Eichmann, responsible for millions of deaths in the Nazi concentration camps, captured by Israeli agents in Argentina. His memoirs, written in the Israeli jail where he awaited trial, could hardly be seen as the expected confession of a sinister war criminal. Far from seeing himself as a hero or arch-villain, the mass murderer described himself as "a man of average character, with good qualities and many faults." (Marvin 75)

There is no remorse, no expressions of emotion, only justifications of his behavior as that of an ordinary German obeying orders from his superiors. The Jewish Virtual Library, a very comprehensive online encyclopedia, reveals excerpts from this text which puzzled Vonnegut at the time he was writing *Mother Night*, as well as many readers today. It is interesting to note that Eichmann used the same approach as the fictional author of the "confessions of a white widowed male," Humbert Humbert from Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*. Eichmann, like Humbert Humbert, is expected by almost everyone to be a horrible, despicable creature, but is writing his "confessional text" having in mind the court he would be facing. Vonnegut's protagonist would do the same immediately afterwards. What might be the connection between Eichmann the arch-villain and Howard W. Campbell Jr. as the main character of a very complex war story is a question that can be considered if one, like Vonnegut himself in the early 1960s, follows first Eichmann's "honest, autobiographical" strategy.

The Jewish Virtual Library fragments (Eichmann's Memoirs jewishvirtuallibrary.org) show Eichmann initially sketching an ordinary personal picture: the report is interspersed with idyllic descriptions of towns and landscapes as well as with vivid accounts of single

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episodes. The author depicts his own personality using stereotypes: love for nature, simple, strongly connected with his family; strictly bound by discipline, void of personal ambition. He describes himself as being of limited intellect, practical, a self-made man, no villain, no hero. On several occasions he insists that he was never anti-Semitic nor hostile to foreigners, gradually introducing the less pleasant contribution he had to the carrying out of Hitler's orders concerning the final solution to the Jewish problem: the extermination of about six million people, men, women, and children.

Vonnegut starts from the Humbert Humbert formula, as well as from the Adolf Eichmann memoir design, but achieves surprisingly different effects in the fictional handling of the story of his *Mother Night* protagonist. As already mentioned, the "confessions of Howard W. Campbell Jr." are preceded by the author's introduction (added to the 1966 edition), and then by what it is claimed to be Vonnegut the editor's note. The pattern of his external stratum of the novel, showing two different representations of Vonnegut as author and editor (of Campbell's "memoirs") gives by its mere form an indication of the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde nature of the experience the book tries to capture, the relationship between good and evil inside the individual as public figure caught in a very complex situation, where, at least as far as his large audience is concerned, he is "the one he pretends to be."

Mother Night turns out to be a war novel at more levels than *Slaughterhouse-Five.* In the latter text Billy Pilgrim is not a warrior and a hero, just an innocent witness in what some call a war or an anti-war novel. If, as a result of his terrible war experience, Billy Pilgrim comes unstuck in time, loses any form of human agency and appears to have become reconciled with fate (things are as they should be, there is nothing I can do about it, he is likely to think), Howard Campbell in *Mother Night* fights on several fronts during his World War II experience, as a publicly known Nazi propagandist, as an anonymous agent for the Allies, but he is also waging a painful inner war, as a result of his double identity.

The structure of the book enables suggestions about themes, the frame of the "autobiography" and a clarification of the novel's title, as well as Vonnegut's position as an American of German descent. It contributes to the overall pattern of a book where honesty and dishonesty, certainty and relativism, light and darkness are interwoven in puzzling ways. This framing of the central story is further complicated by further framing within the central story, in a bewildering play of reflecting and distorting mirrors, which contributes to the complexity of the problems raised in the novel.

"Vonnegut the author" confidently makes that central statement in the first paragraph of the introduction: "We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be" – a belief that the main character would like to challenge and reconsider in one of Vonnegut's rare books in which one can think about a possible interpretation of his protagonists as tragic characters in apparently comic books (or, at least, containing a strong comic, black humour dimension).

In the autobiographical introduction, the writer reminisces about his own war experience as a German American soldier, his POW days culminating in his traumatic experience of the bombing of Dresden. He is not biased by his German heritage in his engagement with the story he is about to retell. He says, however, in order to stress how much ideology can affect individuals, how much it can influence our identity: "If I'd been born in Germany, I suppose I would have been a Nazi, bopping Jews and gypsies and Poles around, […] warming myself with my secretly virtuous insides."

"Vonnegut the editor" says that the book's title is Howard Campbell's, not his (or "Vonnegut the author"'s). He clarifies its origin and significance. It comes from a speech given by Mephistopheles in Goethe's *Faust*. In it the demon says that he is part of the

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darkness (*Mother Night*) that gave birth to light, and that the latter has difficulty breaking itself free from what it came from.

The plot of Campbell's narrative begins in 1961, as the protagonist is awaiting trial in an Israeli prison for crimes against humanity (at about the same time, Adolf Eichmann was doing the same thing in the same place). He describes his complex identity as the interplay of conflicting factors: he is an American by birth, a Nazi by reputation, and a cosmopolitan or nationless person by inclination. What follows will dramatize the protagonist's conflicting identity positions, the clash between the groups he belongs to, the roles he performs?

Instead of beginning his autobiography in a straightforward manner, Campbell initially presents his four guards in the Israeli prison and their different war stories, an undertaking that blurs the boundary between good and evil from the very start, and creates a web of various attitudes in which his own narrative is then introduced. Whether we see this as Campbell's shrewd plan or the author's, the general effect is that the protagonist's major crime, whatever it is that he did, which we will find out later, is made to look more problematic.

The first Jewish guard, Arnold Marx, is so young he does not know who Joseph Goebbels was. An archaeologist by hobby, Arnold tells Howard Campbell about a massacre committed by his own ancestors, the Jews that were settling in Palestine. Around 1400 BC, 40,000 inhabitants, men, women and children of the ancient city of Hazor, were slaughtered by the opposing Israelites. The victors were following their god's orders much in the same way German concentration camp Nazi officers were following their Fuhrer's directions.

Arnold Marx's story is intended to be added to the story of the Holocaust the Jews themselves were subjected to in World War II. There are no clear-cut distinctions between good and bad people and peoples, and the two massacres, the ancient one and the recent one, are seen as unfortunate events in a long series of atrocities across history and beyond. Ironically, a Jewish amateur archaeologist reinserts a forgotten episode into history. This highlights the fact that history is not the faithful record of what actually happened, but a selective choice of "heroes" and their memorable deeds meant to create a "grand narrative" that gives meaning and direction to a community, on its way to becoming a nation (one of the pillars of what Benedict Anderson calls an imagined community, the nation).

The second guard is a survivor of the concentration camp at Auschwitz. He had worked as a member of the *Sondercommando* there. What saved him from sharing the fate of the other Jews there was Himmler's final order for the closing of the terrible ovens. The strange thing is that, like other Jewish members of the *Sondercommando,* Andor Gutman knew all along that he would soon be eliminated after a while, that his work of dragging the bodies of fellow Jews out of the gas chamber, would be "rewarded" with his own eventual death. Andor could not understand the reason why he had been an accomplice of the Nazi executioners. He obviously realized it had been a very terrible task to perform.

Arpad Kovacs was the third guard, a Hungarian Jew. He had passed himself off as a German by forging his identification papers. His new Aryan identity allowed him to enroll in the SS. He played his role well and behaved like an over-conscientious Nazi, while simultaneously providing intelligence to Jewish militant groups, thus undermining the position of the military unit he was in. His role foreshadows Howard Campbell's. Considering the written records of Campbell's anti-Semitic broadcasts, he finds them incredibly soft and harmless. He goes so far as to claim that, had he witnessed such mild language being used about the Jews by a true German (like Campbell's anti-Semitic messages on the official German radio station), he would have had that German shot for treason. The obvious plan of all this "compare and contrast" business, attributable to Campbell, but actually Vonnegut's own strategy, is to compare and equate the deeds of the

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former SS as the guard in the Israeli prison and the former propaganda chief as a major Nazi criminal, in the same place. It is very difficult to say that one is a Jewish war hero and that the other is a villain.

Bernard Mengel is the last in the guards' gallery of characters that should place Campbell's own story in a special context, where "Mother Night" is the lawful parent of both good and evil in each character. Mengel's story shows another attitude that the horrors of war forced on some of its victims. The Jew tried so hard to deaden his feelings in the face of horror that he was able to simulate death when a German soldier came to extract his gold teeth, taking him for dead. One of the results of this awful experience was Mengel developing an indifference to almost anything having to do with war. There are no hard feelings, no hatred or determination to take revenge left.

Campbell's childhood in America and education in Germany are then briefly described in an autobiographical account. Although his parents moved to Germany when the boy was eleven, he had been born in Schenectady, New York, in 1912, where his father had worked for General Electric. Aspects of Campbell's life in inter-war Germany, aspects of his work for the Nazis, his capture by the Americans at the end of the war appear further on. All evidence confirms the reader's expectations that this is the story of a sinister Nazi, awaiting trial for war crimes committed against humankind.

It is only in Chapter 8 that the reader finds out about Campbell's real identity. He had actually been that male Mata Hari alluded to by Campbell himself at the beginning of his account, dedicated to the famous World War I female spy. Campbell's broadcasts had carried valuable coded information for the Allies. The reader is now invited to reconsider his or her opinion about the protagonist.

Campbell had married a German woman in Germany, where he had become an appreciated playwright. His romantic plays dramatized pure good fighting against pure evil. The Nazis identified with the purely good heroes, obviously admiring young Campbell's art. Before World War II began, in 1938, an envoy representing the American secret services got in touch with him and got him to become an American undercover agent. From an American perspective he becomes a hero almost nobody knows about (those who do know are his immediate superior and the President of the United States), risking his life to serve the land in which he had been born.

Campbell does not do it out of patriotism, but out of a desire to play his identity role as if it were a theatrical part. The temptation to do some dangerous acting is something that appeals to him. He starts pretending and leading a double life. He firmly believes, or at least he hopes, that he will be able to clearly make a distinction between his inner self and his outer self, the persona supported by his public actions. The inner self is the one that matters to him, the public mask is insubstantial, he thinks, only a part in a play that he plays. The protagonist attempts to talk himself into believing that he can stay away from the horrible world in which he plays opposite roles on two opposite sides, taking refuge in his own "Reich für zwei," his love for his wife Helga. Lawrence Broer, in a study of the role of schizophrenia in Vonnegut's fiction, notes the protagonist's flawed vision of his identity:

> …attempts preservation of body and soul by burying and hiding an essential part of himself within the confines of his own mind and projecting another make-believe self to the outer world. As a writer, he had been used to creating romantic fantasies – insanely melodramatic portrayals of heroism and villainy. (…) The problem becomes that both as a writer and Nazi propagandist, he deludes himself that he can separate the fake from the real. (Broer 55)

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He is wrong to believe that, when World War II breaks out, the propaganda that he engages in is so exaggerated that no sane person would accept it for the real thing. He gradually turns into a very effective Nazi propaganda instrument, a voice that encourages and motivates the Nazis to be aggressive at the front and cruel to the Jews. On encountering his father-in-law, a confirmed Nazi, just before Germany has to accept defeat, Campbell hears Werner Noth's confession. His father-in-law admits that until then he had suspected him to be a spy (now the reader knows that that was true). Hating him, he would have liked to prove that, and to have his American son-in-law executed for treason. But at that moment, the situation stood differently, and Noth appreciates Howard's important contribution to the German war effort:

> …you could never have served the enemy as well as you served us, he said. "I realized that almost all the ideas that I hold now, that make me unashamed of anything I may have felt or done as a Nazi, came not from Hitler, not from Goebbels, not from Himmler – but from you." He took my hand. "You alone kept me from concluding that Germany had gone insane." (*MN* 80-81)

Howard Campbell's double identity can be seen in his official propaganda messages: the words unambiguously express hatred against those that Nazi Germany considers its opponents, including the Jews. However, the pauses and coughs in the delivery of the text are coded messages, intended for the American secret services. His split personality is revealed in his pathetic attempts to keep the purity of his "inner self" by his occasional "defections" to his "nation for two," where he and his wife Helga can avoid the meanness of the outside world, while constantly having to return and play his widely different public role.

The autobiography attributed to Campbell, his "heroic journey of initiation", to borrow the words of the other Campbell (Joseph Campbell) in his theory in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* is then completed in the postwar years up to the protagonist's final rest in the Israeli prison. Howard Campbell's wife, who had disappeared towards the end of the war, miraculously turns up after more than ten years, looking incredibly young. For a former writer of romantic plays, this should come as no surprise, one might think. Romantic complications appear, as now Campbell lives in America and he moves in a world of spies in disguise, where resurrected Helga has her part to play. Like Campbell himself during the war, the other characters have double identities.

It appears that his beloved spouse returned from the dead is Helga's younger sister, an East German agent thus engaging in theatrical activities herself. The painter George Kraft, Campbell's good friend, is actually Iona Potapov, a Russian spy assigned to follow him closely for a reason he will soon find out. Characters take on and off a series of identities in a bewildering series of scenes. Helga's sister, Resi, eventually shows her love for the protagonist, giving up her acting and committing suicide. The Russian spy Iona Potapov metamorphosises himself eventually into George Kraft. Captured by American agents, he turns into the painter George Kraft, the simulacrum turning into the real thing, finding, in prison, artistic fulfillment and his own identity.

Campbell becomes tired of all these games in which people mistake his role. He finally rejects the fanatical friendship of his American Nazi fans and surrenders to Israeli agents, in order to be tried for his wartime activities. One person in the world is left (the other one, President Roosevelt, as is well known, had died in 1945) who knows that he was an American agent. The message which is his written testimony reaches Campbell in time to save his life in a kind of *deus ex machina* grand finale. Quite unexpectedly for the reader who is not fully aware of the protagonist's bitter inner conflict, Campbell, by himself, decides to die. His ethical side decides "to hang Howard W. Campbell, for crimes against himself." (*MN*

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192) He is tragically aware that the dark, but visible and tangible part of his identity, which terribly impacted other people's lives, was far more important than the invisible "positive self" which was known only to two people, however important these people might have been.

The postmodern author has used his fictional design to create a puzzling, dizzying world in which genres such as autobiography and documentary realism, war fiction, war thriller, as well as the interplay of truth and falsehood, various simulacra, good and evil, hero and villain, as well as the relativity of historical accounts, work together to challenge what the readers apparently take for granted.

The autography form which frames the body of the text, much in the same way as the same technique works in the other war novel, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, creates an impression of realism and authenticity at first, to be reconsidered by what is to follow. The main character is introduced as a war criminal ushered in by a "real" writer and a "real" editor. The true confession of a criminal's war crimes is what one first expects. The perception that slowly takes shape is that the main character is not guilty, and what the reader is prompted to expect next is the fact that there will be a happy-ending: the American secret services will intervene, Howard Campbell will be proved innocent. Eventually, he is not exonerated, but not sentenced to death by the Israelis, either. He finds himself guilty and sentences himself to death for crimes committed…against himself, or against his true self, for being what he "only" assumed to be, in a terribly public display of a false persona.

Campbell succeeds in attracting the readers' sympathy. He is finally aware that there is no pure good and no pure evil, like in his youthful theatrical productions. He has painfully come to learn something, in postmodernist fashion, of the indeterminate, unstable, problematic nature of identity and history, of the way in which conflicting versions of the same person (the word "person" coming from "persona," a mask) or story can be constructed, and that the subject, although enslaved by history, builds itself, thus becoming answerable. Campbell is now aware that he must accept responsibility for the public mask which he accepted, irrespective of the initial motivation.

Campbell's Janus-faced identity pattern is in keeping with the postmodern world of multiple and fragmented selves and moral uncertainty, and a schizophrenic vision will appear in his other war novel, and in several of his other literary productions. But the critical deconstructing that the author engages in is not supposed to "undermine" representation whatsoever. His undertaking is, to a certain extent, an invitation to read what we consider as "textualized reality" more clearly and critically, sometimes assuming an alien perspective from which to look and decipher things that we tend to take for granted. His approach is probably not intended to subvert "history," but to reconsider it, as Patricia Waugh thinks that Rushdie and Vonnegut do: "both redefine 'history' by assaulting the Hegelian foundations of it as a dialectical movement underwritten by metaphysical causality and necessity…" (Waugh 61)

Howard Campbell is about to write and re-write his personal history, and Vonnegut, above and behind him, is dealing with the pattern of the novel in order to raise important issues and to get the reader to review crucial historical events, aware that history is not an account of hard and dried facts, but an ongoing process of reinterpretation and revision.

Disapproving of a certain "revisionism" in the manner in which the author represents the bombing of Dresden in *Slaughterhouse-Five* ("the bombing of Germany, rather than the German Holocaust, becomes for him the massacre that is situated beyond the bounds of representation" (Watts in Vonnegut 2000: 98)), Philip Watts goes on to charge Vonnegut with the indirect expression of Nazi sympathies, with Louis-Ferdinand Celine becoming his model for reinterpreting the complex narratives of history:

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> …Vonnegut's fiction constantly returns to an attraction to fascism, a tendency … in other texts of the same period that exhibit a desire not so much to excuse as to understand and perhaps also to exorcise, to purge the guilt associated with fascist atrocities. (Watts in Vonnegut 2000: 98)

One is supposed to understand someone's sensitivity to the author blurring the line between good and evil when it comes to character delineation in fictional accounts, whether they tackle historical events in a direct manner or not. Nevertheless it is difficult to find enough evidence to charge Vonnegut with being a Nazi sympathizer in this novel or in any other book. It is true that he seems to set the image of the "humane" Campbell-the-American-German against a complex background in which we find the pathetically caricatured American Nazis, as well as the Jews who make terrible moral compromises, but it is hard to see here that he approves of his protagonist or of Nazism in general. He has Campbell sentence himself to death, inviting readers, one may safely say, to be responsible and be serious about the roles they assume in history and in their own personal histories, which give them the necessary, vital self-esteem they need in order to live with themselves, and not to condemn themselves, the way Campbell eventually does. Sanford Pinsker gives Vonnegut his due when it comes to the exploration of "the heart of darkness" of his characters' identity as an indication to phenomena we should be aware of in our own processes of self-examination:

> Vonnegut's point about the Nazi doppelganger within each of us, his insistence that each apparent Self has a concealed counterpart just underneath the skin, makes good – all *too* good – on a notion contemporary fiction inherits from earlier works like *Heart of Darkness* or *Women in Love*. (Pinsker 1980: 91)

His incredulity, or rather, reservations about accepting the grand narratives of war and history may be seen as one of the hallmarks of the postmodern sensibility, according to Lyotard's famous essay. Vonnegut has shown this as early as the 1950s, *Mother Night* has confirmed this at the beginning of the 1960s, and *Slaughterhouse-Five* will complete the picture. What will change will not wholly be a shift in the author's artistic vision regarding heroes, history and war, as significant changes in America's cultural ethos in the first place.

The years – less than a decade – separating the publication of Vonnegut's war novels, *Mother Night* and *Slaughterhouse-Five*, with the attending cultural shifts that occurred in the 1960s, explain the different reception that the two novels had. Vonnegut was still to wait for the right moment to successfully convey some of his messages, but some of them were already coming across in a world where war and heroes no longer had the mythical significance they used to have in earlier societies. Vonnegut referred to them as forms that defied meaning and got the audiences to take over, rather than being manipulated by pro-war heroic discourses.

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